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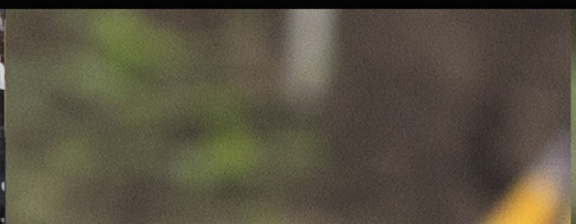
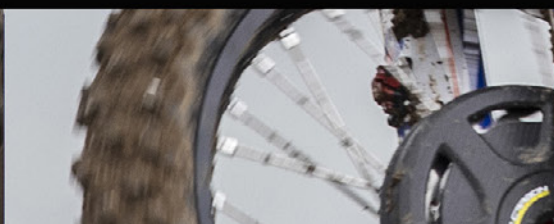
Dean Wilson - Team Great Britain

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Brian Bogers - Team Holland

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Glen Coldenhoff - Team Holland





Christophe Charlier - Team France



Gautier Paulin - Team France



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THE LONG STORY

Dean Wilson provided one of the nicer stories from the 2017 Motocross of Nations. Twelve months ago the former AMA National champion was out of a job and out of form after two seasons decimated by knee injuries. Fast-forward to October '17 and the 25 year old is on the podium for his country and a works Husqvarna rider after a campaign of reassurance and invigoration. Who says real come-backs don't exist?

Photo by Ray Archer









FOCUS FOCUS

After a two-week break MotoGP faces an intercontinental drive with Japan, Australia and Malaysia forming the customary three-week critical dash to the crown. Will Jorge Lorenzo be able to meddle in the Marquez-Viñales-Dovizioso axis with a first win on the Ducati? See a special interview with his crew chief and a David Emmett Blog on the Majorcan in this issue

Photo by CormacGP

3'S A CROWD

Jonathan Rea may have missed out on motocross stardom(!) but added to his own '1-1' with another WorldSBK championship and a slice of history that should stand for a good while yet. Don't miss Graeme Brown's excellent compilation of imagery and latest Blog in these pages

Photo by GeeBee Images





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0 MX

MONSTER ENERGY MOTOCROSS OF NATIONS

MATTERLEY BASIN (UK) - OCTOBER 1ST - 71st EDITION

MXGP winner: Max Anstie, Husqvarna (Team GBR)

MX2 winner: Hunter Lawrence, Team Australia

MXOpen winner: Jeffrey Herlings, KTM (Team Netherlands)

Nations: France (Paulin, Febvre, Charlie)



ONS

MXON

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

PETIT FOURS



3 THINGS THAT MADE A MUDDY MATTERLEY MXON WORTHY THE TRUDGE

1.

MOVE ME MATTERLEY

Subject of a feature interview in the next issue of OTOR, original Matterley Basin designer Johnny Douglas Hamilton was one of the circuit's biggest assets in preparation for the second MXoN. The track is only the second to stage the sport's biggest race on two occasions so far this century (Ernee in France was the first). The Scot had been scraping, moulding, screening stone and re-working the course for over two months beforehand and also shaping other parts of the site to try and cope with the size of the MXoN as well as attempting to cater for potential bad weather.

Hamilton and his team were later joined by Justin Barclay and Youthstream staff in the final days but the elevated start, new drop-down second turn, table-top next to one of the most densely populated areas of the venue were the noticeable elements on the face of what was thousands of hours of labour (have a look at the Tommy Searle preview clip linked [HERE](#) to appreciate Matterley over a month before the Nations came to Winchester).

Grand Prix riders already rate Matterley as one of the best tracks in MXGP and people like Team USA's Zach Osborne was moved to call it one of the best in the world on Saturday evening. Despite rain during the week and a particularly damp Friday, for practice and qualification the English dirt was in prime shape on Saturday and the freedom and interpretation it allowed for the Heat races permitted Osborne to charge up from outside the top ten and snare Pole Position. The forecast was already a topic of conversation by then and the drizzle and rain that arrived Saturday night was a great shame. Still, the track held up well. It could have been a horrific mudder in the style of Indonesia and the Grand Prix Pays de Montbeliard two weeks earlier. Goggles and clutches took the worst of the abuse as did the turnstiles but that final moto chase between Max Anstie, Jeffrey Herlings and Romain Febvre, until the Frenchman opted for team safety and pitted for an eyewear change, was worth the perseverance. Credit to the many fans who slithered up and down the slopes and bore the wind and rain for the whole

day and who eventually still had the enthusiasm to flock across the breadth of the site for more podium pandemonium. Which leads us into...

2.

HOME PASSION. ERNEE ON REPEAT

The protective and insulating qualities of a beer-or-three were no doubt well tested through the climate but even so the quantity and enthusiasm of the public brave enough to park and traverse the circuit on Sunday was commendable and a little surprising. By the start of the third and final sprint and with gusts of wind blowing rain sideways and parts of Matterley disappearing into a low cloud that scraped the hillside, we were ready for the flag to finally fall on the season (in our defence Grands Prix in the USA, Holland and France in the previous five weeks had all been weather-hit) but the fences were still packed and were eventually pushed down to enable the run to the start straight and podium joy. The French, Dutch and British in particular gathered to make a noisy, smoky and colourful bouncing mass of chants and cheers. It was like a beacon of positivity in the gloom and a great celebration of French brilliance, British resurgence and Herlings' otherworldliness for the orange brigade.







In 2016 Maggiora had a potent atmosphere thanks to the compact site. Matterley was the opposite in terms of topography but just as powerful because there was a feeling of defiance. People were going to see some quality racing, regardless of their footwear and momentarily forgetting they might need to have their car or motorhome towed back onto a hard-standing road.

Ernee in 2005 gave the MXoN a pointed plunge of adrenaline and rebirthed the competition after a few weird years of indifference. Ten years later and the Normandy circuit was again a reference for how fans and spectators respond to the history, emotion and patriotism associated with this race. It would have been reasonable to expect a dampener in 2017 due to the conditions – much in the same way that 2003 in Zolder was also wet and subdued – but it didn't feel that way. You can only wonder if the same – treasured - vibe will be present at RedBud in eleven months time.

3. THE LAST MOTO

Max Anstie will rightfully be remembered as the hero of Matterley Basin. The 24 year old hadn't won a single MXGP race before coming to his home event (although had obtained two podium finishes from the last two rounds of the FIM World Champion-

ship and his first term in the premier class) and coupled his starts together with a proficiency around the leaps and energised by several thousand flags to make it really count. Anstie had shown previous good form at Matterley in MX2 in 2015.

On that day he fought with Jeffrey Herlings for the win and was blitzed by the Dutchman and Valentin Guillod on the penultimate lap of the first moto. Perhaps some of that disappointment hovered subconsciously. Max himself said he had learned from the last minute relegation by his Dutch rival two weeks earlier in France and the two riders engaged in a repeat of their Villars sous Ecot duel once Herlings had dealt with his goggle-and-backmarker issues to close a four second gap to zero by the final circulation. Anstie's prominence in the mud in France and at Matterley and known technique in the sand means that the talk of Cairoli-Herlings in 2018 could well be premature and doing some of the others in the MXGP select a disservice.

Romain Febvre, winner of his first ever moto on the YZ450F at Matterley in 2015, was also riding well within himself to stay close to Anstie and, before he signalled to the pitlane for goggles over the jump immediately after the finish line deep into the race, was part of a three-way contest that meant the clock was ticking down fast.

The tension was ramped up by the knowledge that Britain and Holland were dicing for the second step of the podium and Dean Wilson was in the sights of Switzerland's Arnaud Tonus. Even the most positive British fan would have been waiting for some kind of mishap to strike at the last minute and ruin a first rostrum appearance in exactly twenty years. But Wilson stayed up and Anstie fended off Herlings. The last rider to go 1-1 at the Nations was Romain Febvre in 2015 after Gautier Paulin in 2014. Tony Cairoli managed it at Teutschenthal in 2013 and Lommel in 2012 and Ryan Villopoto in 2011; some impressive company there and one can only wonder if Anstie has accepted the heavily likelihood that Sunday October 1st will be a career highlight unlikely to be repeated.

[THINGS WE DIDN'T LIKE]

Rubbish: literally. The Matterley banking on Saturday night resembled the fall-out of waste-dump explosion. Crap everywhere.

It's hard to know whether people could not be arsed to pick up their own trash or there were not enough bins (an oversight from the first meetings at Matterley) but it made walking the site even grimmer aside from the slick mud.



KYB: Such was the shock (sorry) at Cole Seely's rear suspension failing in both races that Honda felt compelled to issue a statement on the technical gremlins a few days after the Nations. There were red faces in the red camp. In MXGP and Europe Tim Gajser and Evgeny Bobryshev run Showa equipment and their U.S. counterparts also until this summer. The disaster could not have happened in a bigger window for motocross and brings to mind Ben Townley's KTM smoky fireball of a DNF at Lierop in 2004. It is hard to say whether Seely's continued presence in the races would have had much bear-

ing on Team USA's chances of a podium-shot but it was obviously not the expected outcome. Or maybe it was? The most successful Nation in the history of the competition is now building a little catalogue of misfortune; from broken front wheels, set-up misery, Japanese riders falling out of the sky and now suspension turmoil. The Americans have to be able to turn this around next year for what will be the third Nations to visit USA territory since the start of the millennium... but what will the (even) later scheduling mean for selection and prioritisation?















MXON



LOOKING AHEAD...

One little part of the Motocross of Nations that is often and easily overlooked is the press conference tease of the following MXGP season that takes place as part of the media opportunities schedule.

This year at Matterley Basin several rumours were confirmed by Youthstream President Giuseppe Luongo and a few surprises cropped up. To summarise: goodbye to the USGP for now with RedBud welcoming the 2018 MXoN and thus the rather unpopular and forced Grand Prix of Mexico also swallows the worm, the MXGP-mad Indonesian fanbase (a country with apparently six million in motorcycle sales) will host two rounds of the 2018 series in European summer time, Turkey comes back to the slate for the first time since Istanbul ran a busy if somewhat chaotic race (fans were lining the side of the jumps like some sort of 1960s retro event) in 2009, the Spanish GP lives; and in the capable hands of the Red Sands facility near Benicasim funded by the Valencian government. Lastly the first ever Grand Prix of China will be run in 2019 and at an undetermined site near Shanghai.

Not a bad little round-up with confirmation of just three flyaway rounds in a nineteen-twenty fixture list and the calendar is expected to be released next week.

The shape of the competition that will start again in just five months time around the volcanic terrain of Neuquen in Argentina already prompts the imagination regarding what we'll see on the track. While the roulette nature of the sport indicates the utter absence of a 'sure thing' it is hard to escape the feeling that a fit Jeffrey Herlings will be looking to run the whole way with the baton.

The Dutchman has risen to the heights of his MX2 form and ability in the second half of the MXGP season. It was fascinating watching two Red Bull KTM athletes go about painting their smaller and bigger pictures:

Herlings proving his point by gobbling as many as possible while Tony Cairoli tapered down his window of risk and massaged the cushion he had already inflated over his peers. At times the palettes touched. We enjoyed some tasty scenes between the pair at two Grands Prix at least, and the prospect of a Cairoli in his reactive and fiery best at Arco di Trento matching with a Herlings in attack mode from any of the last six of seven that he won is enough to justify a ticket, flight, hotel reservation or internet viewing package alone.

Much hype and hoopla was made about Ryan Villopoto's doomed Grand Prix attempt in 2015 and how it brought together the best of the AMA against the best of MXGP in the form of Cairoli at that time.

By Adam Wheeler



While the new brewing rivalry is hardly enticing for those that have little love for the Austrian brand, and could well present some headaches for the Red Bull KTM team (although as Pit Beirer opined at Matterley Basin: two riders fighting each other for the title? What a wonderful problem to have...) I think it presents a juicier face-off than the Villopoto 'gamble' and with more potential than anything we've seen in MXGP for some time. Both are multiple world champions; Cairoli is the second most successful rider in the history of the sport, Herlings is third in the list. There is an age gap of eight years and a cultural divide.

Cairoli said to us in an exclusive interview recently: "I'm different [to him] with my mentality. I never say 'I am the best' or 'nobody can beat me' and he is the one that will say that. I don't like that so much. There is always someone better than you! So I never had that mentality in my head...but I also think it is a little bit typical of the Dutch!

If they start to get near the top then they start to 'fly' a little bit. Of course there are also Italians like this but it is not my case. I have never said 'I am the best try to beat me'. I have just tried to show it through my career."

Herlings is already forming his own 'team within the team' and knows that taking on Cairoli also means a sizeable quota of the Italian staff of the Red Bull KTM set-up as well. He has already had a taste of it in the last two months. What will happen? Expect two strategies for the title that will be both similar and very different at certain times. Herlings seems to possess more capacity for speed and to place the bar where others have to leap but Cairoli can really stretch his legs when the need arises. More than anything I want to see someone really push the best of Tony.

Clement Desalle and Gautier Paulin tried their best since 2010 but couldn't rally the #222 for long and once the Sicilian had that large numerical advantage in the standings then it was only a matter of control and intelligence.

Jeffrey will know he will have to beat Tony on various Sundays (maybe even some Saturdays as well for psychological aid) but also keep a lid on him in the championship table. If Cairoli does his usual ploy of building, building, building points, then he will again go into accountancy default and force his teammate to regularly live on the limit to peg anything back.

Can I back out of the hyping process for a moment?

Watch Rockstar Energy IceOne Husqvarna in 2018 and second years for both Paulin and Anstie on similar bikes to the KTMs. The keyword for Antti Pyrhonen's crew will be 'consistency'; Cairoli and Herlings will rarely drop their guard.

Tim Gajser's 2017 ended up much like it started. The Slovenian was fast but usurped by Cairoli in Qatar while dealing with a streaming cold. Tim had to deal with more physical problems as the campaign progressed while the forces of experience carried on without him. Gajser can only be a little wiser and maybe a little freer without the weight of 'world champion' following his name for the first time in three seasons. Romain Febvre will have dialled in the 2018 YZ450F in Monster Energy colours. Clement Desalle is another year older and might be able to beat the likes of Gajser and Herlings on guile but how the Belgian feels with that Monster Energy Kawasaki will determine his competitiveness and whether he can rise higher than top five firmaments.

Anyway, crystal-balling is slightly premature with the engines still warm from testing. The way that 2017 pulled its way through the final muddy throes helped construct a feeling of anticipation.

We are all used to Cairoli's brilliance but it is Herlings' maturation – as expected, with a couple of bumps on the way – that has really teed things up nicely. The pre-season races for 2017 showed us that Cairoli was quick and comfortable on the 450 SX-F and he drove that impression right into the heart of MXGP with his 1-1 in Qatar. Will he be able to do the same at Neuquen? It already tingles the fingers to think about it.



MXON





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0 **FEATURE**

THE GRADUATE

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

ASKING MAX ANSTIE HOW HE
MADE THE GRADE IN MXGP







With two rounds to go in 2017 MXGP Tony Cairoli won his ninth title. At the last Grand Prix Pauls Jonass claimed his first. After these two headlines for the FIM world championship came Jeffrey Herlings' unbeatable speed and rapid reformation as the 'complete' MXGP racer. It would not be unfair to say that Max Anstie's development in the premier class and the sensational end to '17 at the Motocross of Nations was a narrative not too far behind.

Anstie frustrated and dazzled in equal measures in a six-year MX2 stint where he did not have the same team or motorcycle from one season to the next. He was one of the best sand riders behind Herlings and his technique and speed was never in doubt. His decision-making and lack of guidance were, however, inhibiting factors.

He won Grands Prix in 2015 and 2016 (both at Lommel with accolades in Switzerland, Latvia and Italy also arriving) and should have been in with a late chance of the '15 crown until a costly race mistake in the Czech Republic while heading for another victory. Anstie's switch to Jacky Marten's Rockstar Husqvarna team at the end of 2015 looked chancey, especially with the Dixon Kawasaki set-up starting to chime but the Englishman (who chased Supercross glory after an impressive junior career and through a stint living with his father and step-family in California) displayed shrewdness in his alliance with Husqvarna and a contract into MXGP via Kimi Raikkonen's IceOne team that finally gave #99 the support structure and environment he craved.

An ankle injury aside Anstie blossomed slightly away from the radar in 2017 with semi-frequent top five speed and presence. Gautier Paulin and Max Nagl filled the spotlight for the squad and the brand, and Anstie digested (and then revelled in) the working methods of Team Manager Antti Pyrhonen and co-ordinator Tomi Konttinen. "Max is very motivated, so he fits well into our team, our structure and our programme," said Pyrhonen at Villars sous Ecot. "We want to do things as well as we can and don't want to leave any stone unturned. Max is fully committed to that and I think we can see through his progress in MXGP."

A first podium fell in Ottobiano, Italy for round eleven. He then arrived to the final two events with Cairoli looking to wrap his story and Herlings still very much on the prowl. Two more trophies were bagged and he came close to beating his former MX2 rival in the mud of Villars, just two weeks before Motocross of Nations fame. Anstie was arguably the last to 'splash' in 2017 but he 'drenched the front row' in France and then in the UK.

"I'm satisfied with his progress and it is important that we both want more... but in this class you also have to be patient," Pyrhonen mused. "If you want to take too many steps at once then maybe you get injured and you miss that learning curve you need to take. We had a good season together and with another good autumn/winter behind us I think he will be ready for the next step, which is battling for podiums and the top five consistently."



We're on the lookout for Max at Villars. The rain has tumbled intermittently in France. He is deep inside the multi-tiered living area at the circuit a short distance from the Swiss border. We're speaking before his race-winning tilt on Sunday and two weeks before he bore the heaviest pressure from his seven-year stint on the international stage at Matterley Basin. With hindsight is a good time to examine how Max has progressed and why is now ready to explode.

Anstie is in the back of his old-fashioned truck and getting changed for warm-up. Talking with the 24 year old never feels dull.

He is articulate, almost theatrical with the way he expresses himself, and has no problem with vocalising his thoughts and impressions. He is clearly a person and an athlete that thinks a great deal about his methods and his status. It must rankle when he hasn't had the best direction or advice in the past – he seems one of those individuals that will wince with the idea of time being lost or wasted. But is also modest enough to know when he might have dropped the ball or was too 'nice' to chuck a few toys around to get what he wanted. In 2017 he seemed very content inside the pram...



MAX ANSTIE

This is perhaps the most organised you have been and it has paid off this season...

Yeah, definitely.

Were you too young or too undemanding to push for what you wanted in other teams and situations?

I don't know. I knew what I wanted...but I was in different situations. There is a big step between MX2 and MXGP: definitely. There are five-six mega, full-factory teams in this category. In MX2 there are good teams...but they don't have all the pieces of the puzzle. And that's fine, it's the class and a step of development. So I think the difference is in the team [Rockstar Energy IceOne Husqvarna] being right for me and having the capabilities to allow me to be as good as I want to be. It has been the best-organised and well-planned period for me. It has taken a lot of stress away: where I have to be,

what training to do, what riding we're doing. They have allowed me to focus on what is important and then go to the race thinking only about one thing. I know we have done our work and there is nothing to worry about.

Backing up a little bit: was there a moment towards the end of MX2 where you were disappointed or annoyed not to have come closer to that title?

Erm...I feel like I made the best of each situation every year. I also feel like it was a progression. I don't really feel like 'Oh, if only I could have won an MX2 title...' I do feel that if I could have stayed one more year with Husky [Jacky Martens] then we could have been a lot better again. Every single year I rode a 250 I changed bikes.



I stayed with [Steve] Dixon's team for two years – the only team I have done that – and even then we changed bikes. It takes a lot to learn but I'm good at that and I think I adapted well this year. The FC450 is still a Husky so that makes it easier and I'm still working with the same 'group' of people so they know what I like. So it was an easy transition and I feel that next year I will be steps ahead. OK, there is always testing to do and there is a new bike coming, things like that, but we are already much further advanced than we were.

podiums and if luck goes my way and I get good starts then I can fight for race wins, like I did in Switzerland. I'm a bit hit-and-miss with some things but I'm learning and I think I will improve next year because I am with the same group of guys and set-up. There is no pressure or stress with it.

You must have known what you were walking into with IceOne but were you still surprised at how regimented and set-up it was? Is it the definition of a factory team?

“I THINK I HAVE DONE WELL AND HAVE MADE IT HAPPEN WITH THIS TEAM. IF I'M A BIT PISSED OFF ONE DAY THEN I LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND THINK 'F**KING HELL, I'VE WASTED A LOT OF MY TIME AND SHOULD HAVE BEEN ON BETTER TEAMS AND GETTING BETTER RESULTS'. I DO THINK THAT JOURNEY HAS MADE ME STRONGER...”

If the opportunity to have another real 'go' at the 250 championship had been there then great but the whole experience has been about setting me up to be in the position where I am and with such a good team. I could have stayed another year with Dixon and I was third in the world championship there but I was looking at the future and where I wanted to be in two years time. I feel that I am closer now to winning races or being in a good battle with the top guys than I ever was on the 250; even though I did win on that bike when Jeffrey [Herlings] wasn't there. When he was I couldn't match him. Now, on his day he is still great, but there are many other great riders and I feel like I am one of them. OK, I haven't been consistent in the top three all the time but I can run up there and go for

Yeah. I was-and-wasn't surprised. I knew Antti and I knew how much Kimi was involved, and coming from that [F1] background you are used to such a high level of performance and structure. I was surprised the first time I saw the workshop, but after you've seen it you quickly realise 'OK, this is the real deal...we are not here to mess about'. It must be better than any other workshop in the world because I've been to many in the US and also Europe. It's amazing.

Does it also make you think 'god, I have to make a bit of a statement...even if it is my first year'?

At the beginning of the year I didn't know what to expect. I was good on the 250 but not great. I was strong but not really strong.



0 FEATURE

So as we started training I was a bit unsure. Antti is very good at eliminating pressure and stress within the team by asking us all to train together. We work physically and on the track together. So we are riding at the same time and I was able to learn a lot from two guys who had won MXGPs and were riders I looked up to. Sometimes I would be really fast in practice and I'd think 'that's good'... but then the whole team was there and if I didn't get the result at the weekend then... Apart from a few little bits then the package was ready and I was going fast regularly on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday but had to transfer it to the race. I know that training is different but we're meant to push ourselves. It wasn't like we started off and I was the little 250 kid who was miles off the pace. It feels like a big thing and a race is just another day of training.

Were you sceptical of that method in the beginning? Did you prefer to do your own thing?

I had to trust that Antti and Tomi knew what they were doing. It was my job to ride the bike. The hardest part was being told not to worry about anything else! I was told the bike would be good, that I'd be physically fit and everything else was ready. Even parts of the set-up because I didn't know what was good on a 450; it all felt pretty OK at the time. Things were made very easy for me.

So you weren't a bit worried about whether any of that would be right for you?

Well, at the beginning it was hard for me because in the past it felt like I was always the one who had to push things along and be the manager, goalkeeper and striker all at once.

I've tried to control all that. But by being able to give that up and trust other people I've been able to focus on myself. It's been massive. I don't think it could be better. I don't think it could work for other people...but I like it. There are big name trainers in America and you can see how they train guys together in groups. I think it has pushed their level high. Nobody in Europe really does that. Yeah, you can go to Lommel on a Wednesday and there are quite a few factory teams there but they are not pushing each other together. Whereas we've had a few months now of hearing things like 'OK guys, you've got two minutes to put your helmet on then do a sighting and start your moto'. We don't have to be right behind each other but we start at the same time and share the track. If you want to have an easy day then it really isn't possible. You cannot rest or back-off and some days it is horrible and you think 'I don't fancy it today...' but afterwards you think 'that's made me better because I didn't like the track or the conditions and if I was on my own I would have been two seconds slower'

It seems like a whole other level. Far away from the days of sleeping in the bathroom floor at flyaway GPs and using a nappy as a pillow...

Haha! I thought about this the other day and I feel proud of where we have come from. I think I have done well and have made it happen with this team. I want to just get on with it. If I'm a bit pissed off one day then I look in the mirror and think 'f**king hell, I've wasted a lot of my time and should have been on better teams and getting better results'. I do think that journey has made me stronger and to the point where I feel good about myself. I don't take anything for granted and I like the people I work with.

I appreciate what everyone does for me because I know what it can be like with not very good set-ups, not very good training and sleep and team structures and sometimes not being able to train. Sometimes you get caught up in it all and get a bit spoilt and think 'Oh, I cannot do this or that' but I appreciate what people do for me. I know there are other teams and riders in the paddock having hard times and I don't look and them and think 'they are not doing very well...' I know they are at different stages in their careers and going through a lot of different things. I'm lucky, happy and blessed I am with this team...but I also made that opportunity happen.

Was it really that much of an eye-opener coming to IceOne because you had a good training programme set-up with Kevin Maguire and you had GP-winning performance in MX2?

Kev is great and I still speak with him and we do gym work but the difference with the team is that they are there every day with me. Whether it is a massage, riding or in the gym they will be watching, organising and pushing. Of course I was doing that on my own in the past but Kev is based in Scotland. I was doing my training but it might have been to 95% and now I'm doing it everyday to the point where I'm nearly throwing-up because Tomi is pushing me to my maximum when I need to be. We plan around the races and if there is a free weekend then we will be pushing in an area we want to work on.

It seems all-consuming when it comes to the job and the lifestyle but your personal life has also settled. With Milly it seems you have the 'team' within a team...



I'm really lucky and it is a lot for someone to sacrifice part of their life and leave a job and home in England to come and live in Belgium. We actually got a nice house, little dog and a good set-up. We have a nice life and nice friends. We have spent a lot of time with Shaun Simpson and his wife. Perhaps they are little things but they make the world of difference and you don't feel on your own. We are there to do a job but Milly makes my life a lot easier, better and happier.

Some people said you were hard on a 250. Has the 450 been a relief in that aspect?

[Shows a surprised face] Hmm, same sort of thing. I haven't had too much of a problem; it gets a bit hot sometimes if I'm clutching it! That extra power does help but I've actually made my [engine] power slower than faster! Being able to ride it using technique and smoothness [compared to all-out gas of the 250] is great. It has taken a year to learn the 450 because you do have to ride it differently and you cannot attack the way you could on a 250 and you won't get away with certain things that you did on a 250. Sometimes I have had to change my riding style. At the Portuguese Grand Prix I thought I knew how the track would be but I struggled a lot on Saturday and was way-off the pace. I went back to the team and watched the videos. I had been in that situation a couple of times before in training with my teammates where I had expectations of a track but ended up being two-three seconds slower than I thought I would be. The next day I rode the bike differently and used the gears in another way. So In Portugal I didn't change anything on the bike. The next

day I rode using the gearbox differently and attacked different places and was fourth fastest in warm-up. I thought 'I've got this track now...' I had been trying to ride it like a 250. I knew I had to adapt and in Portugal I was too late doing that as we had a bad gate pick for Sunday. I learnt so much: sometimes you have to ride the bike a bit like this and sometimes a bit like that, sometimes you have to do a bit of both! It is weird. On a 250 you just have to rev it and go flat-out and on a 450 you have to do a few different things. You cannot just rev it because it's aggressive and will just take-off.

For years people have been waiting for you to realise your potential. You are almost like a grizzled veteran of Grand Prix at 24 and although the sport doesn't allow you to get comfy or take things for granted are you finally ready to spring to greater things?

I'm a better racer now than I have ever been. I'm having more fun. I never beat Jeffrey on a 250 and even when I won and he wasn't there I came off the track and later thought 'it wasn't really good enough'. This year I have been able to race against amazing riders, nine times world champions, and it feels great to be at a competitive level with them. I know the programme on and off the bike is as good as theirs. I know what my teammates can do and Nagl led the championship until the midway point of 2015. Paulin has won a lot of GPs. I am one of these guys now. Anything can happen but I am here to do my work in MXGP. My whole 250 career didn't start great but I have got myself into a position where I am with a bloody good team and I had to make that happen.

I wouldn't have wanted to come into MXGP without that level of support: you have to be 'on it' and so solid in this class otherwise you are fifteenth-sixteenth or seventeenth! It is bloody hard. The boys are quick and strong and they don't make mistakes or have days off. They are all doing the same sort of thing and you have to get in there.

You are almost Britain's top rider at this level. You have the factory deal, status and team and all the tools. What is that like to deal with mentally?

It's been a progression. I guess I might feel like that at Matterley. It hasn't really sunk-in how that might feel: going to the Nations on home turf and as the MXGP rider and for Team GB. I watched that race in 2006. From last year until now I don't think the change or transformation I have made has been massive - I was alright - but I am so much stronger now and Antti likes to joke that I walked into the workshop like a boy and now walk down those steps like a man! I'm not sure if it is that but I feel stronger and better for routine and working every day with the team. It builds confidence and my mentality.



MAX ANSTIE





leatt

2018 goodness from the South Africans and a few noteworthy changes. The gear lines see a revised collection of schemes and designs (some 65 in total) and offer more options compared to the launch products from 2017 that were high on performance, quality and feeling (so light, resistant and well-fitting) but split opinion on aesthetics.

Leatt seem to have caught up with the market in this regard. The 5.5 is still the top of the range option. The shirt seems impossibly thin but is bolstered by the Ultraweld fabric which is laser-cut and of a breathable mesh with bonded seams and Brush Guard reinforcement on the elbows. The pant features the internal knee brace system as an extra provision for one of the most obvious sites of wear.

Leatt state of the 5.5: '75% of the material is an ultra-light yet durable Ripstop stretch with a NanoGrip inner leg.' While the more budget-oriented 4.5 pants 'still feature the same 3D molded knee cap reinforcement, include Ripstop stretch and X-Flow mesh panels with an Amara inner leg.' There is now a more enforced 5.5 Enduro option (even over the boot pant) and a slightly 'lite' version of the jacket labelled 4.5. The company have raised their game in terms of gloves and the new 3.5 Lite is the first to feature protection under the fabric. Nanogrip is another of the strong components of an assortment that Leatt have applied to a lot of thought and development.

In the coming issues we'll have a look at a new mid-price helmet (the 4.5 with the same 360 turbine technology) and in a cool red, white and blue design, a brand new neck brace (Leatt's lightest ever) and a reworked knee brace.





www.leatt.com/moto2018/



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PROSPECT

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Over 40 years of racing experience and goggle development have led to our most innovative frame to date. The game-changing Prospect Goggle delivers on all fronts. With a massive field of vision, 50mm Works Film System, and a revolutionary new Lens Lock System, the all-new Prospect sets a new bar in optical performance, allowing you to focus on the line ahead and leave the competition behind.

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 **SCOTT**



BREAST
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scott

Scott continue their march with limited edition goggles and their effort for Breast Cancer Awareness month sees a standout unit of the Prospect available only in October and just 1000 sets are available. Scott have set aside 10,000 dollars of the proceeds to give to the Breast Cancer foundation. The 'BCA' goggle itself features: 'a custom black frame and strap, highlighted with the breast cancer ribbon patch and hot pink SCOTT logo and icon. It also comes with a purple chrome AFC lens, extra clear AFC lens and a special pink micro-fibre bag. The goggle itself will come in a specially marked box.' The pink Prospect will cost 120 euros and many could have already been snapped up so click on the link for more information.

There are some hot rumours that the goggle masters will have a new product to show very shortly and their latest attempt to offer something interesting in the helmet market means that the firm are not sitting pretty on the success of the Prospect.



www.scott-sports.com

STAYING IN VEGAS...

The Monster Energy Cup is this weekend in Las Vegas and as usual with this event, there are some things that we hope will make it memorable. Not all of them have stuck in the mind (quick, name the last four winners?) but sweeping all three mains and collecting one million was pretty cool for Ryan Villopoto in the first edition. And watching Ryan Dungey reach down and shift his bike in the air over the triple was also mesmerizing although I'm sure not so much fun for him.

With that in mind, let's take a look at some things that are interesting about this weekend's race as well as an upside and downside to each of them.

INTERESTING: Two-time World Champion Tim Gajser is racing

UPSIDE: Well, we know Tim wanted to be in the USA full-time by now and so consider this a testing ground for his 'indoor' skills. Yeah, the track doesn't have any whoops and is a bit tamed down but with a strong performance by Gajser, things could look up for him coming over here full-time in 2019. And with a lot of American riders not wanting to push it, he could very well be the surprise here.

DOWNSIDE: Well besides having incredible capabilities on a motorcycle, Gajser has also been known to separate himself from said vehicle from time to time. And well, supercross tends to make this habit worse as we've seen. Anyone watch that SMX Cup in Germany last year? So, yeah, I'm sure Honda Europe will be watching this race with one eye closed praying that Tim doesn't go for it.

INTERESTING: Justin Barcia is racing a privateer Honda

UPSIDE: Well, Barcia is going the privateer route for this race (and no, don't start any GoFund Me's for this privateer, he's doing ok) and back on a Honda where he had so much success before. Barcia's been hurt plenty in SX and hasn't had the results so he finds himself trying to prove that he's still a force in the sport. And nothing is motivating for a rider like shelling out his own money for stuff along with making all the phone calls himself. Add in Barcia's obvious talent and motivation and this could be a real cool story.

By Steve Matthes



DOWNSIDE: Well he didn't seem like he was 100% prepared to race in a Racer X interview he did a couple of weeks ago, he mentioned that he hadn't been riding all that much. If he goes out and is just "meh" that might not do much for his stock. And something that held him down on some teams lists was his penchant for ending up in the FIM referee's office defending an aggressive move. If he gets into it again with a rider this weekend, his stereotype will be upheld. I'm betting that Barcia makes news this weekend - good news, bad news - I'm not sure but something happens.

INTERESTING: The Different Stuff

UPSIDE: The MEC brings the folks at Feld that run the series a real world example if things with the format and track design can work or not. The three main events is something that's rumored to be in play at select races next year, the 'no whoops' can be looked at for implementation at some

tracks and a Joker Lane, while not in play for the "real" series, presents an interesting concept for something down the line. For the first time the lane will be faster and can be used to pass someone instead of making the lap longer. This is way better and will help some riders out, present a different strategy instead of just making it universally a 'take it on the last lap unless you crash early' type of thing it was.

DOWNSIDE: Yeah, literally none. This race doesn't mean anything so why not try to entertain the fans as well as provide some racing? Anyone who's read my work over the years knows that I believe the series needs a bit of a refresher. We've finally gotten some change to the main events in terms of making them minutes instead of laps but for the most part, since 1986 we've had the same points, formats, track designs (67 feet for the triples, no more and no less most weekends) so this race is cool in that aspect.



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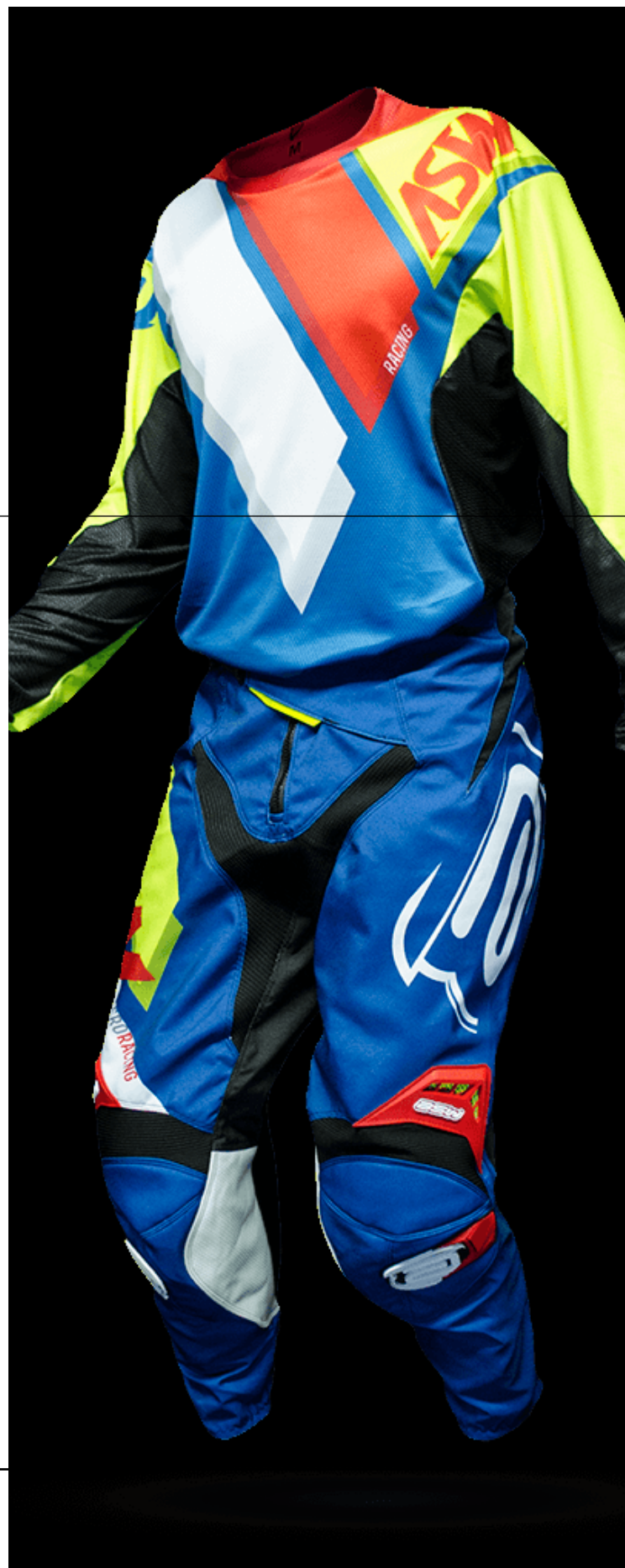


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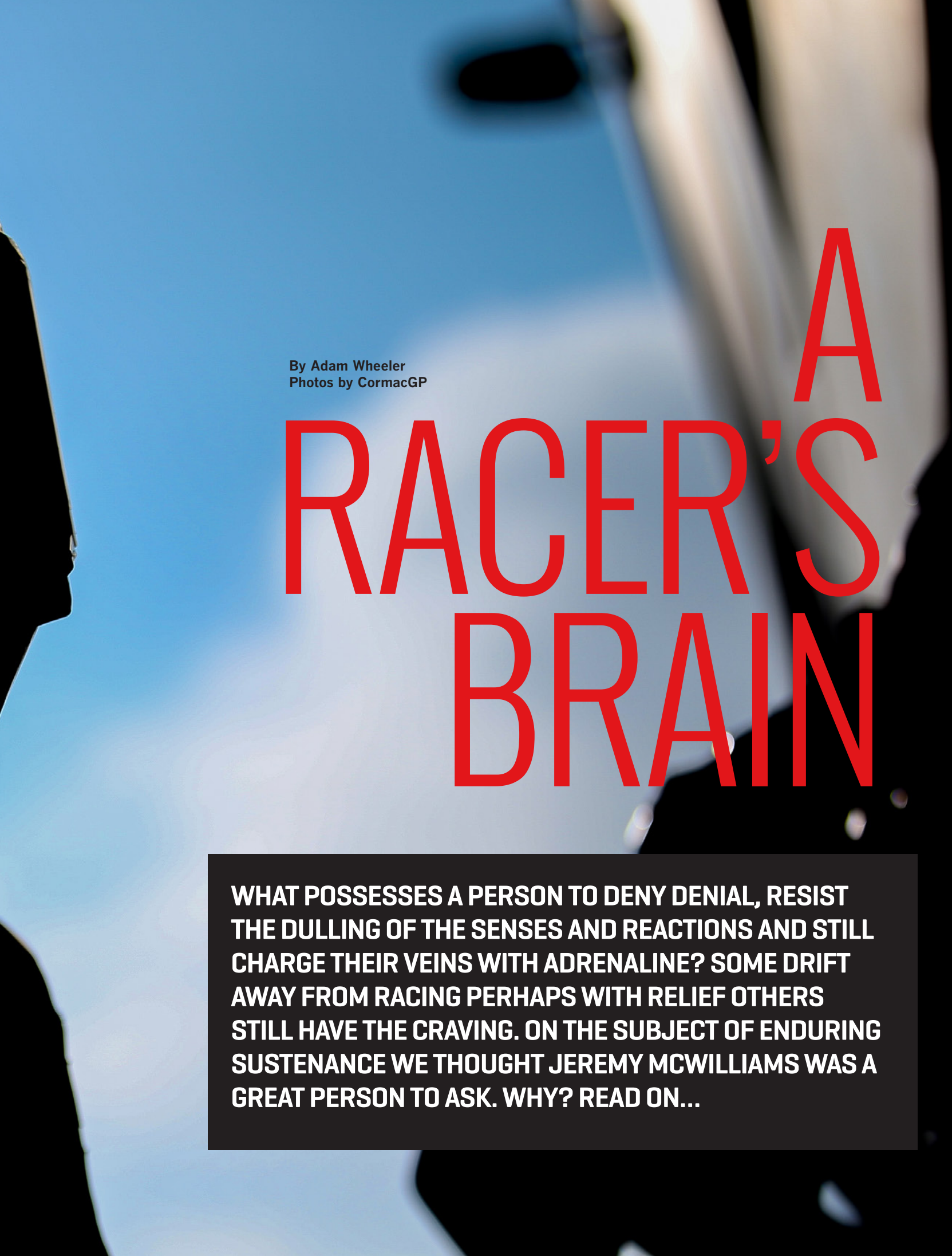
Tucked away in the mud and rain of the Matterley Basin paddock was a slightly different riding gear manufacturer trying to gain more international attention. ASW are a Brazilian firm and have the advantage of a large (and crazily passionate) following for the sport in their home country. Now more than thirty years in existence and a regular backer of Brazilian athletes in the MXoN, ASW are also well-placed to make their mark as they eye expansion.

The attempt to gather more following in their homeland as well as overseas comes through the Podium and Image lines with provisions also for Women and kids. The designs 'pop' with some lively colours and have the attributes associated with most modern kit (stretch fabric, ventilation, riding position construction) but at affordable prices. Watch out for the presence of ASW in distributors near you soon as they are also prolific with cycling and leisure apparel.

www.aswracing.com.br







By Adam Wheeler
Photos by CormacGP

A RACER'S BRAIN

WHAT POSSESSES A PERSON TO DENY DENIAL, RESIST THE DULLING OF THE SENSES AND REACTIONS AND STILL CHARGE THEIR VEINS WITH ADRENALINE? SOME DRIFT AWAY FROM RACING PERHAPS WITH RELIEF OTHERS STILL HAVE THE CRAVING. ON THE SUBJECT OF ENDURING SUSTENANCE WE THOUGHT JEREMY MCWILLIAMS WAS A GREAT PERSON TO ASK. WHY? READ ON...

Jeremy McWilliams sits opposite us in the Alpinestars hospitality. The 53 year old face etched with experience of eyeballs straining against physics, nine and a half fingers a reminder for every minute of his life as to the sharp dangers of a profession in which he still actively dips a toe (we assume he has ten of those). The Northern Irishman is a sage of racing and his post-MotoGP career since 2007 has tapped into a feeling, talent and knowledge of the profession to the point where he is now a sought-after and appreciated observer of his craft.

He was a British underdog of Grand Prix when the country had relatively little to cheer. His efforts in the 250s and on the unfancied Aprilia and Proton machinery in the premier class were part of the fabric of Grand Prix narrative when MotoGP was in the grip of the Rossi-years. Jeremy has since become a valuable asset for KTM (after the Austrian initially agreed to sign him for their aborted 2004 MotoGP attempt and then let him go) in their R&D – a lot of the excellent 1290 Super Duke benefitted from his input - and now the new Customer Racing division; a promising new project for the company as they look to refine their bond between product, clientele and competition in some exciting new series and opportunities. He plays a development role for the Moto3 British Talent Team initiative and for Dorna. And he still races. Competing in the NW200 only last year and putting a hand into the wasps nest that is SS300 this summer.

We chat for some time about the new generation of MotoGP paddock and – like many aspects of cultural life in 2017 – how there is less patience and a more ‘disposable’ attitude towards riders. Life probably wasn’t too easy in McWilliams twelve-thirteen year tenure (he amazingly competed in Moto2 in 2014) but he thinks it is pretty tough and perhaps more ruthless at this current time.

McWilliams still has an acute sense of life and meaning as a rider and racer. A forty minute conversation feels like a cursory attempt to get to the bottom of an extraordinary existence and one that won’t pause. For that reason we tack a final thought onto a conversation that seems to pass in a blur...

You keep on racing and remain very active on the bike. Do you arrive to moments when you think ‘what am I doing?!’

I had this conversation with someone yesterday actually. I was riding for KTM at Mugello in the Supersport 300 category last month. I remember thinking at that time ‘what am I doing there?’ and I had that light bulb moment. The kids around me had no fear whatsoever: that’s what we used to be like! They will ride until they hurt themselves. They’ll ride into the side of you, they’ll ride underneath you, over the top of you: that’s just the way the sport is. We’ve been talking recently about whether racers should be training on MX bikes; well, they [the GP stars] don’t see any danger in that. In a rating from 1-100 they don’t even see it as a 1. Enduro, motocross, trials, flat track: there isn’t any doubt in any of their minds that they will get hurt.

Looking back now you think 'what was I doing back then?' but then you don't know any better. You were riding through injuries and picking up new injuries on top of old ones and taking them through to the next round. I can remember being lifted on and off the motorcycle and being carted directly from the garage into Costa's Clinica Mobile and think it was normal; here we go back to the Clinica again. It was part and parcel.

**Did you have blinkers on and that time?
Was there time to reflect?**

I think you just get on with it and there is no inkling. The Supersport race was an eye-opener just recently. I was sixteenth on the last lap and made the top ten at the finish but I had to ride into other riders to do that! It is only afterwards when you think 'that wasn't the smartest thing to be doing...' I cannot really afford to pick up more injuries at this stage in my career and then carry out my normal day-to-day duties. But when you get invited to do these races your rider brain kicks in and says 'of course I'll do that!' but afterwards your business brain kicks in and says 'what were you doing!' I watch Moto3 very closely because of John [McPhee] and the British Talent Team project and you don't want to be in the middle of that championship! It is so competitive and you really have to take your brain out and put it at the side of the racetrack before you take part.

It seems you still have a big part of the racer brain engaged. Most riders would stop a GP career, close a chapter and look for the next role...

Yeah, yeah. I was still racing the NW200 until last year and it was not until my family sat me down and said "what the hell are you doing?!" that I woke up a bit.



I went through it this year with the kids. My sons are asking me what on earth I am doing when it should be the other way around'. They are 19 and 22 and so that was a bit of a reality check. Although, we've also been standing on the top of the podium at the Northwest and they have been absolutely ecstatic. So there are two sides to it. You have that huge buzz of winning a race in your homeland that is held in such high regard and then afterwards reflecting and wondering if you are doing the right thing. I was in the middle of all the incidents where Malachi Mitchell-Thomas lost his life and Ryan Farquhar almost lost his life and I was lucky to get through the carnage. When the boys and my wife saw that then it started the questions...but if I was invited to do it again tomorrow I would find it difficult to say no.

Really?

Yeah, and it is a similar thing as to why Valentino Rossi is racing so soon after a broken leg: he is living for the euphoria that it brings with all those wins, podiums, fastest laps and records. It is just someone he has to do. If he had ten times what he has earned already then he would still be doing what he's doing.

Is it a case of struggling to find something to replace it?

It is difficult to replace it with anything. [Although] there is quite an adrenaline buzz working in a garage and with a rider here, particularly when he is doing well and you can help in some way. There is great job satisfaction with that, and working with young kids in general to get into the British Talent Cup or a KTM youngster get into the World Final and KTM UK with the 390 Cup. I really enjoy that and it's where I feel most comfortable, working with other riders. It is the best job you could have as a former rider.

Was there a point where you had to ask yourself whether you could do it? The cliché is that some great riders don't make the best coaches...

Yeah. I guess so. There is no instruction book for it. As you said some riders can give good information and others cannot. In the same way that some riders really understand bike set-up and some don't really have a clue or some make good development riders and others don't. Some riders didn't want to develop bikes. I was always someone that enjoyed that part of it and it fed into my work with KTM where I enjoyed watching those bikes progress and become successful. Working with young riders is the same thing. You like to see that you can impart your knowledge and it helps them advance in some way. To be honest a lot of my time is spent helping them set up their bikes! Finding out why



A RACER'S BRAIN: MCWILLIAMS

they cannot progress on the track and then looking at the bike for a base setting because they are at an age that they don't really understand what is going on around them and below them. Their helpers might be their dad or their best mate and they won't be so knowledgeable with suspension.

There must also be a pastoral or paternal side as well though. It must have been an education for you to tap into the psychological side as much as the mechanical...

You are there as a shoulder to cry on as well when things are not going right and I guess this is when your fatherly instincts kick-in. This might be why I wouldn't make a great team boss in today's environment because I'd be siding with my rider when things are not going right or [he is] not performing. I guess everybody

needs something different and every single rider is different. Some are really headstrong and very focussed and tunnel-visioned where they don't need a lot of help from others around them whereas others need some assurance to help them on their way. As soon as you meet a rider you know what kind of rider he is-

So soon?

Yeah, you cannot imagine Cal Crutchlow needing much of a head doctor-

But what was he like when he was fifteen?!

Ha! I guess he was just a little tearaway. You know what I mean though; there are riders with very different personalities and Cal has always been very focussed and that 'one-goal' kind of rider and little got between that. He knew where he wanted to go from an early age and he's achieved that.



Other riders just don't have that 'killer instinct' maybe. They just need different things and it is more difficult to get those kinds of riders up the ladder. Those that know exactly what they want and will get it at all costs just get on with it.

I can remember watching Eurosport and cheering you on manically in '98 when you were taking that unlikely podium at Sachsenring and it just seems that now you have more 'strings to your bow' these days: racer, mentor, set-up guy, KTM tester...do you feel you have broadened your skill set?

I cannot believe you remember Sachsenring! It's a good question...talking about KTM; when I started with them my role was quite different. I was helping the Production Department get the best out of the RC8 and that continued until I started helping with the 1290

For anybody who has been racing their whole career then it is a bit like a dream job. Customer Racing are now looking after the world final as well as I've always been a part of that as a mentor and as a technical guy; anything that those guys need to know about that bike then they can ask me because I've been working on it. I can look at the bike straight away and offer advice and suggestions and often immediately see results with the kids and it is a lot of fun. The other side is working with Dorna and finding the next talented riders in the UK and we have only just begun this project with the selection process and now moving towards 2018 with the first test in Spain and then six-seven rounds in the UK running alongside BSB, MotoGP, WorldSBK with the final round in Spain. I'll hopefully have the chance to work with those kids in the UK when the championship

"KTM SAID THEY WANTED ME TO HAVE THE MOTOGP RIDE BUT THEY DIDN'T HAVE THE POWER OR THE BUDGET. I WOULD NOT BE WHERE I AM TODAY IF I HAD MADE A SONG AND DANCE. I COULD HAVE BEEN SWEEPING THE STREETS IF I HAD MADE ANOTHER MOVE..."

Super Duke. I was quite busy with the R&D department and the role now keeps changing. With customer racing I am doing some of what I did with R&D such as developing the RC390 for Supersport and the next projects will be the 790, next 1290 and then MotoGP hopefully in the near future. So that's kinda what I was already into when I stopped racing and it was a lot of fun. It means working with bikes and appeasing yourself when you need that little fix of riding motorcycles.

is ongoing. My main focus is continuing to work with KTM and Thomas Kuttrof, Wolfgang Felber and the Customer Racing department as that is my bread-and-butter and where I'd like to be as long as possible. It is a great factory to work with and we're based just down the road from Mattighofen. There are a lot of interesting projects coming along as this department grows then it will be hard to dedicate time to other things.

Were there any missteps? Or moments at crossroads when full-time Grand Prix racing came to an end?

Well, I got onto this road back in 2004. KTM asked me if I would test their MotoGP project and I was lucky enough to ride it at Jerez because Aprilia gave me dispensation to ride it for an afternoon even though I was contracted to them for the 2004: this wouldn't happen now! Aprilia were pulling out of MotoGP at the end of '04 so after the KTM request I pleaded with Gigi [Dall'igna] and at first he said no but then I said "come on, you guys are stopping and I need a job..." This career has always been one-season-to-the-next and it is still like that now. So he let me go and in that afternoon we got to within 0.9 of Capirossi's best time that day and he was quickest. KTM went forward with the project and they gave me a contract. The biggest one of my life and I thought 'that was worth an afternoon's work'. At the same time the BBC were coming along and they wanted a mainland rider – this is where it gets a bit political – because Northern Ireland wasn't really one thing or the other. So Shakey [Shane Byrne] got the contract and I walked away from it. In the end KTM came back to me at the end of '05 and asked me to do some stuff with them and that relationship has gone from strength to strength.

How did you feel about that at the time?

KTM said they really wanted me to have the ride but they didn't have the power to do it or the budget for two riders. The TV rights had been sold and there was pressure within to have an English rider. I said "fine..." and walked away from it. I took a job in the UK racing BSB which didn't go to plan. I had no qualms or hard feelings about it. I would not be where I am working today if I had made a song and dance.





I said: "let's keep in touch..." and that's what we did. I think I did the right thing. Other riders might have done it differently. I'd had a good innings in MotoGP. Dorna were very supportive of my years with Aprilia and helped me put those contracts together and without that support I wouldn't have had the factory rides. I understand how it works here. You need to understand the power of persuasion that certain contracts can have. I went to have a chat with Carmelo at the time. We are still friends and that's why I am sat here still doing some work for Dorna and also KTM. I could have been sweeping the streets if I had made another move. I would have had a good contract for one year but nothing compared to what happened after. I am very thankful I can still work in the paddock and I have such a good position with KTM. It gives you a reason to get up and look forward to the work. I might be riding in Texas or testing with Wolfgang and Kutti in Italy.

Riding a Grand Prix bike must be something but also a model that people won't see for another three-four years is also pretty cool...

Yeah! I'd like to do more with R&D but it is limiting with time and we have a lot to do in Customer Racing. What would give me a lot of satisfaction would be to see our RC390 winning races at world level in Supersport because I have been involved in the development of that and with WP suspension guys and through a small Italian team. It would be a great pleasure if we can see that project becoming competitive.

You seem busier than ever...

The next two months our focus is to deliver the world final at Jerez with two wild-cards to be run at the final round of WorldSBK. That's the priority and I'm not doing the MotoGP flyaways. John needed more help at some European tracks. It meant a little bit of space in October to see if R&D needs me. Customer Racing is getting bigger and busier and the next project will be this beautiful little 790 and I haven't

been able to ride it yet, so that's something to look forward to as well as explore the ideas for a racing series around it. Then we have to get on the 1290 to look at some new ideas, get it on the track again and improve it even more for competition. There are some good ideas coming but when they fall into place we never know.

You have a great story and it must be hard to tell everything but it would probably make for an appealing book...

Ha! I think people might find it pretty boring. It has been spoken about actually...but maybe there is not enough to put in it yet. I guess we always feel that our own lives are pretty ordinary. I came up through racing, did OK and stayed busy within racing circles and managed to carry off a future with it. But what could you write about that would be that interesting?

I beg to differ; your career has spanned a lot of eras, riders, machinery. There must be a lot of stories...

I guess it is through sitting with people like yourself that can tease the stories out of you. I remember that Grand Prix in '98 and with Valentino, Loris Capirossi and Tetsuya Harada. During the race I remember catching Valentino and Capirossi and my fuel breather pipe came off and I was getting covered with fuel into the braking zone for Turn1. I had to drop back off, put the pipe back on top of the tank and catch them back up. I remember finishing second and you forget the reasons why. I'm not sure they'd be that interesting! Like every racer, when you stop...[it fades]. Valentino reminded me of this. When we got on the podium he looked at me and laughed and said: "you nearly crashed on the last lap! A huge black line came off your front tyre..." and it wasn't until he reminded me that I remembered! You forget all the bad stuff. You park it and put it behind you and think of the good stuff. I think that makes a good racer. If you carry any baggage then I don't think you could do it. Valentino must have that.

triumph

www.triumphmotorcycles.co.uk/visitor-experience

Bajaj, Moto2 and now another milestone for one of the coolest motorcycle brands there is. Triumph are opening a new visitor centre at their principal home of Hinckley in England (northeast of Coventry in the midlands) that will lead into a 90 minute factory tour with tickets costing 15 pounds each. Rare bikes, memorable scenes and moments that helped towards the company's iconography and the whole Triumph story is complimented by an accompanying shop where some of the desirable products, clothing and accessories can be bought. The visitor centre opens on November 1st and is free to enter. Tour tickets can also be booked to coincide.

Aside from Steve McQueens famous Great Escape bike (not seen since 1962) Triumph also claim: 'In addition to the first model ever made, visitors to the experience will also find a host of rare and unique models including a 1919 Triumph 'Trusty' Model H used during the First World War, the 1959 Bonneville that shook the world and all of the brand's legends with the Hurricane X75, T595 Trident and original '94 Speed Triple.'

Click on one of the links for more info and tour reservations. We'll see if we can post a review of the experience through a visit in the winter (and compare it to Ducati's facility I Borgo Panigale).





A 99 THAT WON'T MELT...

Towards the end of the 2015 season, Ducati Corse bosses decided it was time to sign a big name. The brand new GP15, the first bike to emerge from a Borgo Panigale race department now fully under Gigi Dall'Igna's control, was proving to be competitive. The two Andreas, Dovizioso and Iannone, had racked up a grand total of 8 podiums, and had come within a hair of claiming the season opener at Qatar. The GP16 would be even better, Ducati were sure, and capable of winning a race. But to challenge for a championship, the ultimate goal of Ducati's MotoGP project, they needed something more: one of MotoGP's top riders, to make the difference.

That was a risky strategy. Borgo Panigale was still smarting at the memory of the last time they tried that. The signing of Valentino Rossi for the 2011 and 2012 seasons to replace the departing Casey Stoner had been an unmitigated disaster, for both parties. Rossi had not only failed to win a championship, he had barely managed to get on the podium. Two seconds and a third was all Rossi had to show for his time there, and the Ducati had gained a reputation for being a career killer.

Whatever Rossi's role in that failure – I have heard some experts say that Rossi was still racing at his peak in those two seasons – the blame was placed firmly on the shoulders of Ducati. Filippo Preziosi, the man behind Ducati's successes throughout the 990 era and Casey Stoner's 2007 title, was cast aside. New owners Audi set about reconfiguring the Italian factory for success, eventually tempting Aprilia boss Gigi Dall'Igna to take over the reins.

Dall'Igna completely revamped the structure of the racing department, creating space for the firm's brilliant engineers to collaborate, and build a competitive motorcycle.

2015 proved they could win with riders widely regarded as good, but not exceptional, so Ducati went about trying to tempt a star runner into the fold. Valentino Rossi was not an option, for obvious reasons, Marc Márquez wanted too much money (even for Phillip Morris' deep pockets), and Jorge Lorenzo was looking to leave Yamaha after a fractious and controversial 2015 championship.

By David Emmett



Lorenzo's demands were simple: more money than Rossi earned when he was there, and a chance to win races and even a title on the Ducati, again something Rossi had never managed.

The transition has been anything but easy for Lorenzo. Switching from a Yamaha to a Ducati has proved to be a massive change, requiring a total recalibration of his riding style. On the Yamaha, you brake early, use the bike's handling to enter the corner at high speed, then use that to maximise corner exit. On the Ducati, you carry the brakes all the way to the apex, stop the bike in the middle of the corner, then pick it up as soon as possible and use the mechanical grip to get drive out of corners, and its horsepower to blast past your rivals. On the Yamaha, you rely on a docile engine character and electronics to manage the power. On the Ducati, the fierce bite of its excess horsepower demands a much more subtle touch on the throttle.

Andrea Dovizioso is proving that the bike works when ridden right. The Italian is challenging for a title, and has won four races. Jorge Lorenzo, meanwhile, struggled badly early on, but has started to make real progress since Brno. Standing trackside, you can see the Spaniard piecing everything together, braking deep, picking the bike up, rolling the throttle. But overcoming years of habit takes time, and doing everything perfectly every lap is still a conscious effort.

Still, Ducati want value for the very large sum of money they are spending. Right now, the 12 million euros Ducati are rumoured to be paying Lorenzo is not showing much of a return. Progress is good – the tone through off – the-record chats with Ducati bosses is vastly more positive now than it was at the start of the year – but results are what count. Two podiums are nice, but Ducati expected so much more from Jorge Lorenzo.

Can the Spaniard deliver? He has four races in which to do so. He has looked capable in the past two races, leading both at Misano, then at Aragon. Motegi and Sepang are tracks that play to the strengths of the Ducati, and where horsepower counts for a lot. But oddly enough, Lorenzo's best results have not come at tracks that suit the Desmosedici, but at tracks that suit Lorenzo. Phillip Island, and especially Valencia are two circuits Lorenzo loves. And when he favours a track, he is quick there. Even on a Ducati.

Does it even matter if Lorenzo doesn't get a win this season? It will be a black mark on his career, surely, but what will count is how competitive he has been. A win would be fantastic, but just losing out in the next four races would prove to Ducati, and more importantly Lorenzo, that he can be competitive. Phillip Morris may yet see a return on all that money.

TAKING JL CLOSER

IN RECENT WEEKS, SOON AFTER TROUBLING THE LEADING NAMES IN MOTOGP AND WHITTling THAT EVER-SHRINKING MARGIN TO THE RACE WINNER DOWN, JORGE LORENZO HAS BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO MUTTERING THE SAME SENTIMENTS. "IT'S COMING," HE HAS SAID. "THE VICTORY IS VERY CLOSE." WE FIND OUT JUST HOW MUCH

By Neil Morrison, Photos by CormacGP



There can be no denying the Majorcan appears to be on the cusp of his Ducati breakthrough. Aragon, where he led 15 of the 23 laps and finished third, no more than two seconds back of Marc Marquez, was yet more proof of the five-time world champion's growing confidence and ever-increasing comfort aboard Ducati's GP17.

The ride to this readiness hasn't always been smooth; testing had its share of downs, the Majorcan often wearing an expression of frustration. Performances in Qatar, Holland and Germany underwhelmed, while uncharacteristic lapses prematurely ended his challenge in Argentina and Misano. And it's hard to shake the memory of a bemused Davide Tardozzi – Ducati team boss – looking on as his twelve million Euro man attempted, and failed, to breach the top 20 when qualifying at Assen, a chastening moment as any.

Yet since the summer break, when #99 had time to rigorously assess and evaluate his own performances, Lorenzo has gradually begun to justify the colossal fee Ducati forked out to tempt him from Yamaha and his home for nine years.

And Lorenzo, five times a world champion, hasn't been alone in his quest to challenge at the front in 2017. When it became apparent in the spring of last year that personnel in his Yamaha garage would not be following his lead, Lorenzo began the search for a new crew chief. Of those working in the paddock, it was hard to look beyond Cristian Gabarrini, a man whose CV includes two world titles with Casey Stoner, and a spell in Marquez's garage during that extraordinary championship win in his rookie year.



Having studied a handful of all-time greats from up close, Gabarrini knows how to interpret a rider's feedback better than most. And the Italian is as well placed as any to explain Lorenzo's season to date. At Aragon, Gabarrini spoke to On Track Off Road about his return to Ducati after a six-year spell at Honda, how Lorenzo has gone about adapting his own technique, and why it is futile comparing Ducati test 'staffer' Casey Stoner to any other rider around.



CRISTIAN GABARRINI

Did you come into 2017 thinking Jorge could fight for the championship?

Yeah, sure. The potential was there. Then to use it and put everything in the correct place is difficult. Sometimes we found some extra difficulties that we didn't expect. But sure, my expectation was that.

Was it quite difficult to manage when it became clear it would take some time for Jorge to adjust and the title wouldn't happen this year?

No. In my opinion, you must be focussed on your target. You have to push and always go in the same direction. It doesn't matter what is happening at the moment. This is normal in racing: sometimes you can win easy; sometimes it's impossible to solve a problem. It's part of the job.

What has been the biggest challenge for Jorge in terms of adapting?

For sure, adapting himself to the bike and changing a little bit this riding style without losing any of the advantage of that style is a very difficult thing to do in reality.

You use your riding style and you adapt it to the bike. So you need some time to understand well what you can do to be fast and lose nothing.

When you watch Jorge on the Ducati, he still has that languid, graceful movement. Can you talk a little about how his riding style has changed?

Yeah, but to obtain the same smooth way you [still] have to change something because the bike is different. For sure Jorge is Jorge and his riding style is always there. But he changed a lot: several things in his riding style and some details to keep going smooth on the Ducati. I cannot go deeply into this.

After seven years working with Honda, was it quite a challenge for you to come back here, understand this bike and how to get the best out of it?

It's always interesting because every time you change you have to adapt to a different working style and method. The bike is different and things that you were very familiar with change a bit. It's also exciting.

Was it a culture shock for you or Jorge coming here from a Japanese manufacturer?

No. Communication was not a problem with the Japanese guys and it's not a problem here. At least we speak the same language! But the approach to the work we have to do is a lot different, yes. It's difficult to say if one is better or one is worse. But for sure it's different, the point of view and to take care of a common problem is completely different.

Completely different in what kind of way?

No, I cannot [say]. Sorry.

You mentioned Jorge becoming more competitive after the summer break. He's obviously been using the new aerodynamic fairing since then. Can we appor- tion his form to this or are there other factors at play?

I think the biggest thing was in his mind, and his approach to the race. Then for sure the new fairing helped him because it was made for one of our weakest points. I think most of the changes were because of him.



So the summer break came at the perfect time...

You know, he probably started to analyse data more calmly in his mind. Then he could put it all together and put it in the correct order. He is like a calculator. He is always clear-minded to analyse everything, especially in the order of priority. Sometimes it's unbelievable. I think he did something like this during his holiday.

I guess from Texas until the summer break, Ducati was almost testing every weekend between race weekends. That's a lot of information to take in and try and process...

For us it's simpler because we are ten people working on all the data. But Jorge is alone on the bike. We probably have a bit more control on everything because each guy takes care of an area of the bike, so it's easy to put all the things together. Jorge probably needed more time...but he did very well. As soon as he came back from the holiday, immediately we felt that he had changed his approach. There was something new, something better, something that let him go faster, easier. But the bike was the same.

You said the new aerodynamic feature helped one of your weak points...

Not our weak point in general, but one aspect where Jorge suffered particularly - the feeling with the front. For sure, our fairing helped. If one of the more regular comments is about that and you give him something that works in that area, for sure he must improve.

Can you tell us a bit about Jorge's character? How do you find working with him?

Usually we check data - me and the other engineers - and then make something like a summary, speaking about what he asks us to check in particular. Then we print some screenshots to show him the reality of what we are speaking about. Then we discuss all three together; me, him and Tommaso [Pagano], the electronic engineer. You can understand that he is very familiar to this. He immediately finds on the data sheet what we are speaking about. We don't need to tell him, 'OK, look at this.' He can immediately see it there.

People that have worked with him in the past have commented on his ability to remain focussed and concentrated. Is that something that has stood out as well?

He's unbelievable on that side because his mind is always focussed on the riding style, on the performance. I reckon he's thinking about something to improve even when he's asleep. He's unbelievable. Sometimes when I'm at home he texts me because he's had an idea. Or he'll call me [and say], 'Did you check this or that?' Maybe he's training and so you are not losing your time when you are working with him because every second of his life, at least when he's awake, he's thinking about how he can improve his performance.

I guess that is a great motivator for you and the team, having someone that focussed.

Yeah, yeah. You can never stop because as soon as you stop you have to think there is another guy, the one on the bike who is pushing, pushing, pushing [like this]. This is normal. I think at this level it must be like this.

Have you been a little surprised at how competitive Andrea Dovizioso has been this season?

No. One of your colleagues at the beginning of the season asked me: 'do you think Jorge can win the first race in Qatar?' And my reply was: 'Saying it like this, you have no respect for Dovi.' For Dovi it's the fifth season [with Ducati] and we know very well the potential [of this bike] is. I think that Dovi had more chance to win in Qatar than Jorge. We must be realistic. Then for sure, Jorge had some potential to win but the reality showed us that I was right. There is no magician. I was just observing the reality.

We saw from Mugello that Dovizioso was competitive more or less everywhere bar Sachsenring. Was there a big change with the bike that helped this?

I cannot go very deep [into this] but I think Dovi started this season in the right way. He found a balance at a very high level if we speak about performance. I'm speaking in general mind; the setting of the bike; relationship with the team... Everything looks perfect. So when you live in an area like this, at least you can do your best. Then if your best is good enough to win - we have to show that every Sunday - for sure you are able to push 100 percent. I think Dovi in this moment is in this 'magic' condition.

Has Ducati, as a company, changed a lot since you were last here?

Sure, it changed. Some people are not here any more. The style, the way to work is very similar because we are Italian. We are European so we have a way to do everything. The factory has changed quite a lot.

People always mention the communication between the factory and the staff that work at the track has improved since Gigi Dall'Igna's arrival...

Some minds that take decisions or have some kind of experience - for sure, it's like a waterfall - and this influences every single thing that works from the top down. I think this is normal.

From Brno Jorge has been challenging for the podium or has been close to it in pretty much every race. What's missing? What does he need to win races with Ducati?

If I knew that, I would be able to solve the last part of the gap! Anyway, what we miss in general is one or two tenths in race pace to try to win every race. It doesn't look like much but in reality the last two tenths are very difficult to gain. Like I said before, from Brno after the holiday he improved a lot. Before, if we speak about race pace, we were further away. Now we are very, very close and I think we can be ready maybe tomorrow [Saturday at Aragon], I don't know. When you are so close it takes just a little thing to arrive. When you are there it's easier to stay there.

When you consider the improvements Jorge made over the summer you must think that after this winter he will arrive completely ready for 2018...

I have a different point of view because I chose to work with Ducati and Jorge especially because I expected this. For me, I'm more surprised that we were not there at the beginning. Now that I see the positive trend, this is the normality, what I expected to see. For sure, it's a good thing and positive. But I'm not saying, 'Wow, we are doing a very good job!'

CRISTIAN GABARRINI



I'm saying we are doing the job everybody expected to do. Before we missed something. Jorge was used to a bike that turned a little better. You have to find another way to be fast. Jorge is very strong in corner entry. He was with Yamaha – he was unbelievable. So now he cannot push 100 percent like he did in the past. On one side we are pushing to give him a bike that is closer to his riding style, and on the other side he is pushing to use his riding style in a different way to compensate a little bit this bike's shortcomings.

You worked with Casey during both of his title years and he is currently involved with this project. How effective is he in his role as a test rider?

You know, Casey is a very strange tester because every time he jumps on the bike he is able to make lap times that would put him on the first or second row easily after seven or eight months without riding. For us it's very important what Casey feels and what Casey says to us about the bike in general and parts to test. We are very lucky to have him. OK, Michele [Pirro, Ducati's other test rider] is also doing a great job but Casey has the chance and the capability to push the bike on the limit every lap. Every lap. His limit is the top limit of the top riders that are still riding, still racing. So it's very strange to have a test rider like him.

Livio Suppo has said that this is a quality he looks for in any rider that is charged with developing a bike - the ability to push at the limits all the time.

Yeah, and this is also a characteristic of Casey. When he was racing he always did fewer laps than the others during the practice because his idea was, he always said to me, 'quality laps, not quantity of laps'.

He was able to understand if one thing was better or worse. This is Casey. This is his character. I think he can ride the bike just like this and this is perfect for us.

So it would take, let's say, a normal rider five laps to understand if a change was better. Casey could understand that in one?

Many times he would go out and then pit in immediately, saying he had done just half a lap but it was easy to understand it was worse. And we would change it. And it was true.

Casey is a two-time world champion, Jorge a five-time champion. Both riders will be remembered as greats of the sport. Do you see any similarities between them both, other than a great deal of natural talent? Are their approaches similar?

The common thing is huge talent, for sure. But the rest is very, very different. Almost the opposite. Casey rode the bike, in general, by instinct. He is able to feel the limit immediately. If you change the conditions immediately, he can be fast immediately. This is one thing that I see only in Casey and also with Marc [Marquez] sometimes. I always say it is not correct to make a comparison between Casey and all the rest of the riders. For some things Casey is unique. It's not correct to make a comparison, you know? The first time Casey came here [Aragon in 2010] he was the only one that didn't test here with a standard bike because for him it was useless. He did pole position and won the race. He told us, 'I already told you! It was useless! You can win without testing!'

What is the likelihood that we'll see Jorge score his first win for Ducati before the end of the season?

I hope so for sure and I think so as well. I think at the moment, like Dovi, [he] is in a position and [has] a mentality to fight for the win at every race until the end of the championship.

Finally, as Dovizioso is fighting for the title, do you feel that Ducati is putting in that extra push to ensure he wins? Is there a greater intensity in the box?

To be honest I think we cannot do anything more than what we have done until this moment! We work sometimes very often until midnight. This is Ducati's style to work. Everything that you can do - if you need two extra hours or it's Saturday or Sunday - we do it. We are pushing like crazy.

CRISTIAN GABARRINI



Ducati Corse



Ducati Corse

IN DEFENCE OF MOTO2...

The first four encounters of 2017 suggested the Moto2 class was in for a long year. What has emerged has been of pleasant surprise.

For many, a blisteringly hot morning at Jerez in late April appeared to confirm the fate of this year's Moto2 campaign. As Franco Morbidelli slipped and slid out of the action with two-thirds of the race still to play, sole challenger Alex Marquez was all-but-guaranteed his maiden win in the class. A turgid, drawn-out affair, which seemed to stretch the medium of time, followed and there was a lingering feeling the category was ebbing toward a dreary stasis, the promise of variety offered up in the opening race at Qatar still some way off full fruition.

Such fears came as a result of 2015 and '16, years five and six in the standard engine Moto2 experiment. For a little over two seasons, the racing had flattered to deceive. Those chaotic scenes witnessed regularly in the series' earliest days from 2010 to '12, when upwards of five riders contested the leading positions on a range of chassis, week-in, week-out, were but a distant memory.

No question. When Marquez, Iannone, Espargaro the younger, Redding and others went at it, even MotoGP had to take a back seat. By contrast, the riders-in-line, chase-the-leader showings between a select band of Kalex frames in the years that followed was largely a poor substitute. This season's drawn out affairs at Qatar, Texas and Jerez suggested a continuation of the trend.

A pleasant surprise then as we approach the three flyaway races that, of the three grand prix series, we are perhaps most dependent on Moto2 to deliver a title showdown that goes the distance to mid-November. The championship scrap between the laconic, genial Franco Morbidelli and Thomas Luthi, the series' old boy, coming into the vintage of his career, has been a compelling one since Mugello. A 22-year old pitched against a rider nine years his elder, and, as Morbidelli so eloquently put it in a recent interview:

“two completely different philosophies of approaching the races... two riders, but also two states of minds, two moments in life.” The Italian's 21-point advantage on the back of eight wins is a handy margin to have so late in the season. But Luthi's form in the final four races over recent years suggests this is very much far from over.

But it isn't just the proximity of the title challengers; as a spectacle, Moto2 has surprisingly offered up plenty since that sweltering, snooze inducing affair in Andalusia. The racing has mainly been close, and not just in the usual 'follow-the-leader' style. Outings at Mugello, the Sachsenring and Aragon were fast, frenetic, and bloody good fun, going all the way to the line, while Assen's six-rider ding-dong will surely be remembered among the season's very best contests.

By Neil Morrison



Those saying the depth of the class of 2017 is lacking due to the promotions of last year's 'Fab Four' – Johann Zarco, Alex Rins, Sam Lowes and Jonas Folger – should pay attention to race speeds too. Of the ten dry Moto2 races that have been both dry and run full distance, six were new records. Not exactly figures to conclusively suggest this year's field is utterly exceptional, but lap records were broken at seven of this year's twelve dry outings. And if anything, Zarco's showings in his debut MotoGP campaign (as well as the occasional flash from Folger and Rins) underline the level at which the class was operating in '15 and '16. More often than not, this year's bouts have been faster.

The supporting cast has been largely entertaining too. Aside from the top two, interesting stories are to be found in Alex Marquez's return from the brink, Miguel Oliveira's quiet, methodical improvement and Mattia Pasini's late-career renaissance.

That's before we ponder the perplexing highs and lows of occasional front-runners Takaaki Nakagami and Lorenzo Baldassarri. Regular cameos from rookies Pecco Bagnaia and Brad Binder have added to the overall intrigue, and point to a brighter future in '18, when the inclusion of MotoGP men Lowes and Hector Barbera should make up for Morbidelli and Luthi's departure for the premier class.

That's not to say Moto2 is in perfect shape. In the past two years, the monotony of a near single-chassis series has been a point of concern, a factor that hasn't been entirely remedied in recent months, as evidenced by Kalex's winning of all but one race in '17. Yet KTM's official introduction to the series has come as a real boost. And Suter's return, which eventually ended Kalex's winning run in the class that stretched back to April, '15, coupled with the Tech 3's Mistral pushing toward the top ten in the hands of grafter Xavi Vierge, and '17 has seen the welcome return of variation.

Again, KTM's expansion to run five bikes in '18 will aid this further. And Dorna CEO Carmelo Ezpeleta is sure Triumph's introduction to the class the following year with its 765cc triple cylinder engine with added electronics systems will open up further avenues of innovation to new chassis manufacturers. Perhaps the placing of a limit on the number of certain chassis in the class would be of benefit in future years.

It's understandable that a division with a spec engines will never be upheld with the same dewy-eyed nostalgia as 250s were. But add in a sprinkling of innovation, mandatory chassis variation and the right blend of youth versus experience and the racing will follow more times than not. If we're to measure the success of a series on the entertainment it provides, Moto2 is in fairly good shape, a much welcome surprise after 2017's shaky opening.

FINDING GAINS

**THE 'CONDITIONS OF LEARNING' MAY HAVE BEEN PIONEERED
BY ROBERT GAGNE BUT THE HOPES OF AMERICA RACING
RESTS WITH JAKE GAGNE MAKING SOME QUICK LESSONS IN
A WORLD AWAY FROM HIS MOTOCROSS ORIGINS...**

By Steve English, Photos by GeeBee Images







JAKE GANGE

Motorcycle racing needs its next American star. The lineage of world class US riders has been long and storied over the years. That well of talent has dried up in recent years and the nation has been left waiting patiently for their next star.

From the days when King Kenny Roberts first left the US and went to Europe there has been a constant torrent of talent from the West but that torrent became a stream and most recently a shuck. With the flow of racing talent having been directed off-road over the last ten years it seems as though MotoAmerica might have once again given American riders a setting upon which to build their careers.

“I grew up racing motocross and I was able to win some amateur championships,” said Jake Gange prior to the Magny Cours round of WorldSBK. “I didn’t get on a road race bike until I was fourteen and my dad signed me up for the Rookies Cup. You only had to send in a CV so we figured, why not? They took 120 kids out to Barber in Alabama for the tryouts.

“At that point I had never even watched a road race. I was racing motocross and that was all I cared about! It was like a two-day try out and they called back 22 or 23 of us. Somehow they picked me but I was definitely the slowest of the group that qualified! It was my first and only time ever on asphalt but I made progress in the Rookies Cup and from the first test to the first race I was a little bit outside the top ten. A couple races in, top five. Then the last half, three or four of the last races I won a couple of them and was kind of one of the guys to beat over there. If it wasn’t for the Red Bull Rookies Cup I would not be sitting here. I would probably be racing supercross.”

That’s the challenge facing a lot of American racers; getting the opportunity to race on the road. For many the lure of Supercross and Motocross is too big to turn down but more opportunities are being presented to young riders.

Last year Cameron Beaubier raced for Yamaha as a replacement rider and now Gagne has had the chance to step onto the Red Bull Honda. A one off replacement ride for his home round at Laguna Seca offered him a big stage in front of his home fans but scoring points in France brought with it a lot of added kudos.

The 24 year old has had a lot to learn to make his debut on the world stage but he's been pleased with the season as a whole. "Obviously we've had a lot of new stuff this year. In the US, it was our first year with the Honda and we're the only Honda team in MotoAmerica. There's a lot to take in, a lot to figure out. We struggled early in the year trying to figure out electronics and other things. We have a different package than here in WorldSBK and we didn't run traction control or wheelie control all year. That was both good and bad. It was good for us because at least I got to ride the bike and it was reliable for us.

"In MotoAmerica we want to be with the Yamaha's and Suzuki's. Those teams have a lot of data and experience and that means that they have their stuff really dialed in. I think they could come to WorldSBK and do really well. We kept making progress and in the last three or four races we really figured out some electronics stuff. We were reliable and able to make a lot of progress with the chassis and the suspension.

"Racing the WorldSBK machine at Laguna was good because it allowed me to have a different perspective on the bike because it's so different. Just sitting on it, it feels like a completely different bike because it's got a different tank and

different handlebars, different seat, different pegs. With the power differences, electronics differences, different suspension companies, some different chassis parts it was very interesting."

Having seen Josh Herron race on the world stage in Moto2, as the reigning American Superbike champion, European fans were given an insight into the talent level of the domestic series and it didn't make for pretty viewing. The Californian struggled to adapt and refused to move to Europe. It was something that has clearly left a bitter taste in the mouth of a lot of American riders. Gagne refused to criticise his rival he was keen to stress he'd not make the same mistakes.

"There's a lot of really great American riders. The time since Ben Spies has been tough because there's not been a whole lot of communication between anybody in Europe trying to find riders in the States. It's tough for the teams because they haven't seen many of us American riders. It's good that I got this opportunity and showed kind of what I can do. I know I'm capable of a lot more still.

"I just hope that we can keep getting that opportunity. Cam Beaubier is an amazing superbike rider in the States and he came over and did well in his one round last year. After talking to him he felt it was tough and that he wasn't even that happy with how the weekend went.

"Getting just the opportunity to race at Laguna was the biggest weekend of my life. I learned a lot from it. Unfortunately Stefan Bradl was hurt but the fact that they were happy to call me back is awesome. There's a short list of guys that

are on that list and you have to kind of be in the circle or you're not in the circle. I never was in the circle when I raced in Europe.

"After I won Rookies Cup in 2010 I wanted to race world championship, Moto3. I tried talking to a lot of teams and this and that, and without a bunch of money it wasn't going to go anywhere. But then I went back to the States and raced the next year and then that was 2011 and it's taken until now for me to get the chance again.

"I think being an American makes it tough for sure because I can't find a lot of American sponsors that will come over and want to put their logo on something that's so big in Europe. MotoAmerica are doing their best and the TV package has definitely helped. The racing's always really good. The riders are good. We just need the opportunities."

Running in the points and finishing close to his more experienced teammate, Davide Giugliano, has certainly made people take notice of Gagne. Whether it's enough to afford him further opportunities remains to be seen.





MOTOCROSS...

"I loved every minute of it," remembers Jake. "I was a good amateur dude and rode for KTM and I was able to win some amateur titles. I still ride motocross all the time and that's my main source of training. Two years ago I did an outdoor national in the 450 class and qualified. That, for me, was a dream come true."

"To go up against all those guys that race supercross and motocross full-time and achieve what I did meant that I was really happy. I wanted to get close to the top 20. I knew I was capable of getting a top 20, and I didn't even feel like I had the best day and we ended up like 22nd. One of my goals was to try not to get lapped. It was Roczen and Dungey at that time and I just barely got lapped by them at the end."

Growing up in Southern California Gagne was surrounded by motocross. The Mecca of Motocross offered him plenty of opportunities to test his wits and talent out against the best in the world. As he developed he felt more and more comfortable in that environment and if not for his road racing career taking off he certainly would have had the opportunity to pursue it further.

Will there come a time where he decides to combine his love of both disciplines? “I’m always up for racing in Motocross but that being said I’ve always preferred Motocross to Supercross in the US. I never did any Supercross inside the stadiums because, in my eyes, that’s not really true motocross anymore. Supercross is just so gnarly. The whoops and how many guys on that little track. There’s so much stuff that’s kind of out of your control.

“So I’m not too interested in that but some day I would love to go out and do an outdoor motocross race. Two, thirty-five minute motos, that’s what motocross is all about and that’s what I’m all about. When I did it in 2015, I was riding for Yamaha in the superstock championship in the States, and we only even had one round left. Even though the championship was on the line Yamaha gave me a full factory bike for the Motocross.

“They gave me absolutely everything I needed to do that national and they trusted me not to get hurt or not do anything stupid. It was cool that they let me do that. To go out and race at that National was like coming out to WorldSBK and racing with the best guys in the world. You need the equipment to do well and show that you’re good.”

How good he is on the world stage remains to be seen but for Gagne the opportunity to learn from watching Jonathan Rea, Chaz Davies and the best Superbike riders in the world was something not to be missed. Being thrown in at the deep end of the WorldSBK pool certainly could have left a mark but growing up in California allowed him to understand the importance of a sink or swim mentality.

Being surrounded by the talents of the US motocross scene and trying to prove yourself against them. That competitive streak can only come in useful on a Superbike.

“I love to ride with the best guys, to be on the same track with them. When I ride motocross in Southern California because all the teams are based there and all the top riders are there you are able ride with them. It lets me know where my speed is. Motocross is just the best thing for training for me because I go out and do three, forty-minute motos on the day and go home. For me, riding bicycles, riding road bikes, that doesn’t do shit. You can get some base fitness, but if you’re not riding, you’re not doing much good, in my opinion.”





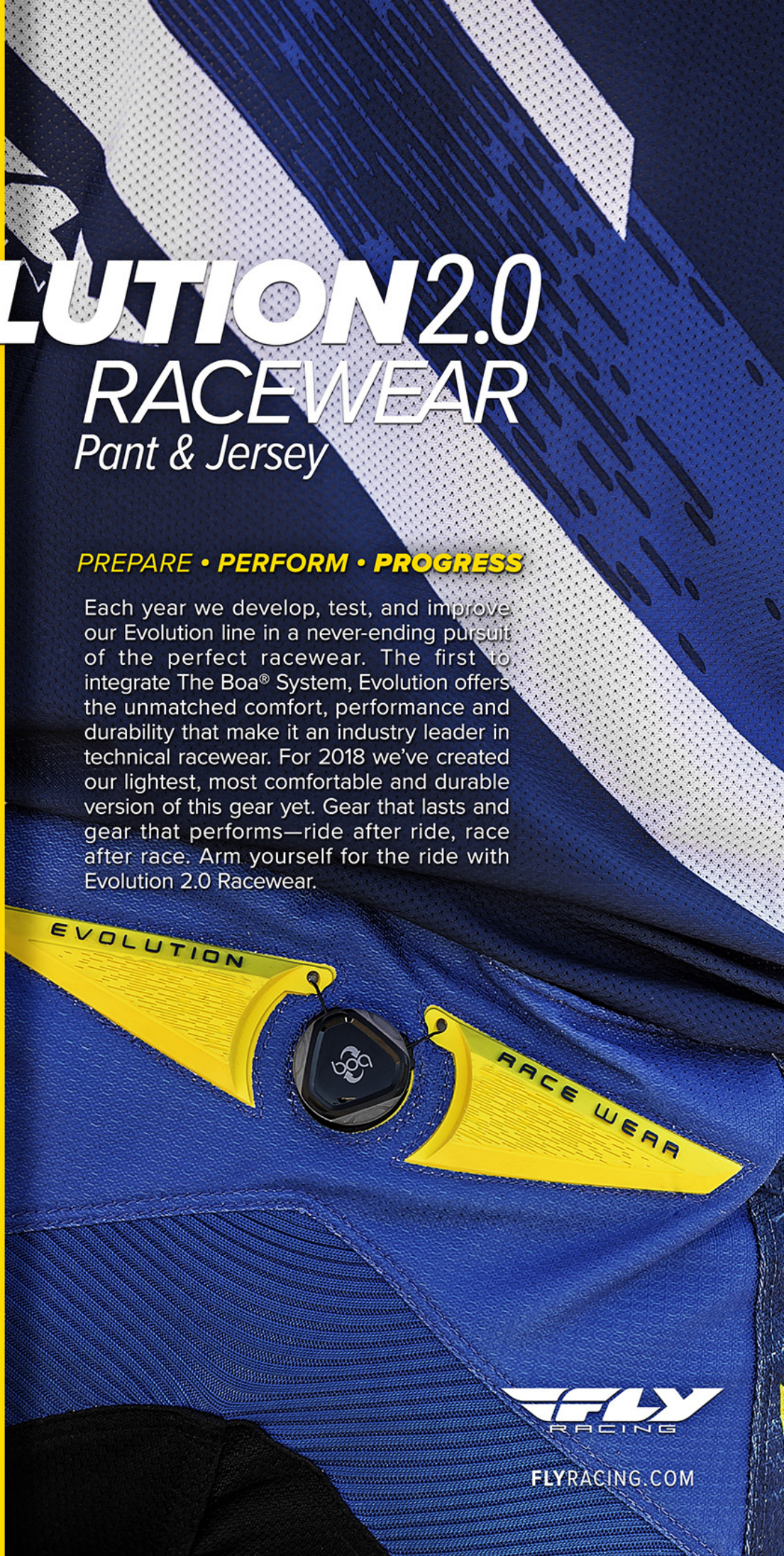
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Off-season time and also a period where riders will be switching off the training regimes and recharging. Getting out on the bicycle will be more about fun than any serious gains but by the time November/December rolls around then the base work phase of prep for 2018 begins in earnest. Whatever the reason for getting the pedals going it is worth looking at Fox's wares and their Legion-derived gear for mountain-bike featuring Cordura material (we tested the enduro Legion line and the stuff is pretty damn tough) and three-layer fabric mean it is a very serious option for fighting the elements like cold and damp. The construction of the three way system in the Attack Fire jacket (130 pounds) means a polyester fleece inner, PR waterproof, windproof and breathable membrane and then a 4-way stretch Ripstop polyester spandex 'face'.

It is still enlightening how much technology and thought goes into performance wear these days. The cut of the jacket is in the riding position and had hi-vis elements. It is abrasion resistant and has an eco-friendly coating helps the fabric deflect water and become saturated. The Attack Fire pants (140) have the same build but with bonded fleece lining for comfort, front hip pockets and the rider 'attack' position for mountain bike. Lastly the Legion gloves cross over perfectly from enduro and have: touch screen compatibility on index finger, brushed fleece bonded Cordura® for protection and warmth, Clarino palm with bonded reinforcement layer in high wear areas, TPU lined Lycra gussets seal out the elements, direct injected TRP protects from knuckle and finger impacts, compression moulded cuff with hook and loop closure. Fox are bringing off-riding and mountain bike even closer together it seems.





PIRELLI FRENCH ROUND

MAGNY-COURS · SEPTEMBER 30-OCTOBER 1ST

Race one winner: Jonathan Rea, Kawasaki

Race two winner: Chaz Davies, Ducati

A wide-angle photograph of the Magna-Cours racetrack. In the foreground, a dark asphalt track curves to the left. A person in a grey vest and black pants stands on the right, holding a large professional video camera. In the middle ground, a person in a bright yellow safety vest and orange pants walks across the track. The background is filled with a large, dense crowd of spectators seated in tiered grandstands. The sky is overcast with heavy, grey clouds.

NO DAMPENER HERE

Gallery & Blog by Graeme Brown/GeeBee images

WORLDSBK FRA





WORLDSBK FRA



JEKYLL AND HYDE...

On most Sundays when I am at the racetrack I am up early and in the press office no later than 8am. Every time I have a weekend at home I think 'this weekend is the one that I get to sleep till after eight.' However, having a young family it is never meant to be. On Sunday it was business as usual and the 'alarm clock' went off at just after 6am, but it did mean that I could watch the F1 Grand Prix live from Japan.

I have to admit that whilst Barbie and the crew were getting their daily briefing, I did doze off. I often find that happens on a Sunday. Formula 1 is the ideal medicament for a Dad Nap. Lewis Hamilton won again and, with Sebastian Vettel's Ferrari suffering a mechanical problem, forcing a DNF, the Mercedes driver extended his championship lead to 59 points with four races still remaining. It means he could secure his fourth championship next time out in the US.

Now I get it when some people express antipathy towards Jonathan Rea and Kawasaki in WorldSBK. F1 technical rules change every season, and yet, at the moment, Mercedes and Hamilton can do little wrong. I said in the last blog that I wouldn't talk about it again but the same rules apply here. The best 'package' is winning most of the time, no matter what.

Jonathan Rea and Kawasaki made history in Magny Cours last time out. He became the first rider in the history of the Superbike Championship to win three titles on the bounce. This year he was utterly dominant. Dorna had tried to level the playing field by changing the grid pattern for Sunday's race two. It meant that every weekend the podium finishers in race one, always JR, started from the third row. However, that only seemed to put another few coals on the fire in his belly, as by the second or third lap he was scorching in to the lead.

He did though, in my view, enjoy a degree of good fortune. Chaz Davies was tipped as the main challenger at the start of the year but a series of crashes throughout the season left him on the back foot and chasing more or less from the second round in Thailand.

The pre-season rhetoric and promise of Yamaha, Honda and Aprilia came to nothing and it was left to Kawasaki team-mate Tom Sykes to mount the main challenge for the title. Tom, however, could not find the same killer instinct to deal with the rehashed Sunday grid and would too often find himself off the podium in race two. Then of course there was the huge crash in Portimao that saw him sit out the weekend and virtually hand Rea the title.

Rea himself had a huge crash at Donington when his rear tyre gave up the ghost heading down Craner Curves, not the ideal place to get off the bike. He got up and walked away, only to come back on Sunday and win race two.

Magny Cours was a similar situation.

By Graeme Brown



Not many people knew that he had hurt himself in the crash during Superpole. Again he bounced, claiming pole position and winning the afternoon's wet race by over 16 seconds, sealing the deal and claiming that record third title. It was only on Sunday that he had to retire after getting caught up in Eugene Laverty's crash in the opening laps.

These incidents for me tell the bigger story of the season. For sure Rea and the ZX-10RR have been the best 'package' in WorldSBK this year again but he has rolled a couple of sixes in coming off relatively unscathed from a couple of crashes whilst his main rivals have been less fortunate. If an incident like that had happened, early in the season; if he had been injured in the Donington crash; if Chaz hadn't crashed in Thailand or whilst leading if Aragon; if, if, if.....

What of the man himself?

All I have heard in the last week or so is that he is a deserving champion and such a nice down to earth guy. Hold on a minute.

Nice guys aren't meant to win championships, are they?

Apparently so. I have been lucky enough to work closely with Jonathan for a number of years. I have seen the arrogant upstart of a teenager that raced in BSB become a more relaxed, mature person that is indeed now relatively down to earth. All of us who have young kids actually have to be. When the shit hits the fan, or quite literally the floor, we have to deal with it. There is no better grounding than having a 4 year old spill your coffee all down you in Costa. A hissy fit and a prima donna attitude isn't going to clean it up.

However, I am sure others will tell you a different story. Jonathan has had a number of spats in the last couple of years with Chaz Davies, most notably and publicly in Assen this year when they clashed during Superpole after JR interfered with Davies' flying lap. There has notably been some friction in the Kawasaki box at times between him and Sykes.

I am also sure few friends have been made on a Sunday when he is coming from the third row and trying to get into the lead as soon as he can.

That for me is what has made Jonathan the champion he is. There is a true Jekyll and Hyde nature to his character. Off the bike he is the normal family man. He has time for public appearances, is supremely confident and charming in front of the camera but when the visor comes down he is a different person. There is an unwavering, single minded, desire to win. He will never settle for second or third. If he thinks he can win a race he will try everything he can to make it happen.

He has also been extremely clever in nurturing the relationship with his Kawasaki team and immediate pit crew. It does not go un-noticed the tight knit nature of Team 65. There was no history or previous personal relationships but since day one Rea has ensured that every single one of that group is fully on board with his set of goals.

Jonathan understands the importance of that relationship and always ensures the team is counted as part of his success, further strengthening that bond.

So where now for Rea? The rumour mill continues to roll about a move to MotoGP. I am sure the WorldSBK bosses at Dorna would love to see the back of him but he is contracted to Kawasaki for 2018. There may yet be a move, stranger things have happened, but as JR points out, nearly every top rider in both championships will see their contracts expire at the end of 2018. Another Superbike crown in his back pocket would only further strengthen his credentials but he has always stated that he would only move to Grand Prix racing on a truly competitive bike. At the moment I see that as a factory Honda, Yamaha or Ducati. Would any of those manufacturers take a gamble and replace one of their 'aliens'?

Another scenario is that Kawasaki decide they have achieved all they can in WorldSBK, and since Dorna currently seems determined to penalize their success, it may be time to return to the GP paddock with an established team and winning rider and see if they can improve on the previous efforts with the Ninja RR.

I appreciate that another year in Superbikes of the Ulsterman dominating is not great box office but like Hamilton in F1 we are witnessing a rider at the top of his game. Who knows what will happen in 2018 but if Rea and Kawasaki keep on winning don't 'blame' them for being so good.



WORLDSBK FRA





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0 BACK PAGE

Monster Energy girls
by CormacGP







'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focussed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP.

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